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AN OPEN LETTER TO GAME PUBLISHERS

Playing games is supposed to be a way to relax and have a little fun. It shouldn't be an exercise in frustration, but all too often it is. There are over two million Amigas in use around the world, and I would have thought that by now, programmers, game designers, and publishers would have learned the basics of being polite to players. Instead, I see far too many games that contain some basic oversight or flaw that seriously detracts from the enjoyment of the game. I want to take some space here to lay out some fundamental things that games should and should not do.

1. Before release, the intended final version should be given to several people who have never seen it before. Beta testing is fine up to a point, but it's usually done by people familiar with the various versions a game goes through and they tend to miss things that fresh eyes and ears don't.
2. Programmers, please, please, turn off the disk drive light when you're done with it. One of the first things Amiga users learn is to *never* pop a disk while the light is on. It's disconcerting, especially for novices, to be told to do so.
3. If a game has a setup process of more than two or three simple steps, and it's fairly easy to get killed off at the beginning of the game, provide a way to save the setup. It's aggravating to spend ten minutes setting options, play for two minutes, get killed off, and then have to repeat the process.
4. If a game is going to be copy-protected, be considerate about it. Use a code-wheel or manual lookup scheme. And the player should never have to enter more than one code. Believe it or not, there are even some games that require the player to enter a code when restarting a game after being killed off. That's rudeness. And don't even think about using disk-based copy-protection; game players hate that worse than anything. It's unreliable and the chances are high that a disk will stop working or won't work on a particular drive. And a game should never, ever demand to write to

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APPRENTICE (Rainbow Arts): The passwords for the levels are: WIZARD SPELLS ARCANES DRUID FAERIE

ATOMINO (Psygnosis):

Level Codes:

- Level 10 IDYLL
- Level 20 TAURUS
- Level 30 NEPTUNE
- Level 40 PHOTON
- Level 50 PLANKTON
- Level 60 INFERNAL
- Level 70 FOSSIL
- Level 80 POISON
- Level 90 SOUP
- Level 100 SULPHATE

AWESOME (Psygnosis): Hit the firebutton while holding down the + key on the keypad. The F1 key then disables enemies, F6 replenishes energy, and 1-0 numeric keys will give you different weapons. There is also a cheat to become invincible. You first have to complete the first attack wave. Once the shields and weapons screen appears, place the cursor at the top left corner of the screen in the shields box. Hold down the + key and hit the firebutton. The screen should flash (if it doesn't, keep trying). You can then transfer all of your shield energy to the

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the original program disk.

5. All games should be hard drive or RAM installable. The days of single-floppy, 512K machines are gone. Most people have at least two floppy drives, a hard drive, and several megabytes of RAM. The portion of sales lost because a game won't work on a bare-bones system will be miniscule compared to the sales lost because players get frustrated with disk swapping and slow play. They will remember the publisher who caused them the frustration and refuse to buy anything from that publisher again. Much of the mail we receive here at .info backs this up.

weapons. The shields will drop to zero, but the ship will be indestructible.

BACK TO THE FUTURE II (Konami): Pause the game and enter THE ONLY NEAT THING TO DO, including spaces. This will cause the game to restart and you'll have infinite lives.

GLOBULOUS (Innerprise): Enter Zvmo!EG as a password and you'll be in cheat mode.

KILLING CLOUD (Konami): To get extra nets and PUPs, enter 1 KILLING for the mission code.

MICKEY MOUSE (Disney): Once the game starts, type in 61315688. A flickering line will appear in the border, indicating that the cheat mode is active. You can then use F2 to get to the next sub-game, F3 to start a fight with a witch, and F4 will refill your water pistol.

NIGHT BREED (Ocean): Enter RISEN FROM THE DEAD to get infinite lives.

PRINCE OF PERSIA (Broderbund): You can skip levels by hitting the Caps Lock key and then L.

XENON II (Bitmap Bros./Cinemaware): Pause the game and type in RUSSIAN AIR. Hitting the N key will take you to the next stage.

6. Games that use joystick or mouse for movement control should provide a method for calibrating the control to the player's liking. In particular, this applies to flight and driving simulations. Not all mice and joysticks, not to mention humans, have the same response. If the control is extremely touchy or too sluggish, players are going to give up and not play the game.
7. Documentation should be clear, concise, and organized in a way that makes it easy to use. If it runs more than a dozen pages or so, it should have a comprehensive index. It's frustrating to be in the middle of a game and have to spend

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a half hour thumbing through a manual to find the one bit of information you need.

8. Adventure games that use puzzles should have online solutions or a separate walk-thru section in the manual. The answers may be perfectly obvious to the programmers and designers, but are often completely beyond what anyone else may come up with.
9. A game should always make a clean exit, either by offering to quit to the Workbench or by offering to reboot the machine. The game should ask whether the player really means it, but it should only ask once. I've seen too many games that either quit immediately on hitting a Quit button, menu item, or key, and I've also been insulted by some games that ask three or four times if I really, really, really want to quit.
10. Despite the impression that most game players are kids, the majority are grown-ups and they should be treated as such. Games and documentation should avoid using slang (I never want to see the word "Rad" used anywhere again) and should never condescend. Everything should also be spelled correctly and be grammatically correct. With the sorry state of the educational system, the least publishers can do is

not make things worse.

11. Games should be accessible. Every game should have some kind of demo mode or quick-start option to show the player exactly what's going on and how to go about playing.

I hope game developers and publishers will take note of some of these points. Game players can help the improvement process along by writing to the publishers; if the developers don't know how you feel about their games, they can't make them better.

NEW NEWSLETTER

We get tons of newsletters around here and one of the most interesting we've seen lately is called *3D World*. Published in Livonia, Michigan, it's a non-profit publication devoted to the field of computer-generated 3D animation and it's billed as "an advanced 3-D animation forum". We picked up a particularly notable item from the second issue that says Pixar, one of the trailblazers in computer animation, is working on a feature-length animated film to be released by Walt Disney Productions in 1994. The film's creative director is John Lasseter, who won an Oscar for Pixar's *Tin Toy*. The

3D World Sig can be contacted at 9602 Hartel, Livonia, MI 48150. 313-525-3203.

FRACTAL STUFF

It has been a couple of years since we've mentioned Amygdala and it's high time we drew attention to the company again. Devoted to things fractal, Amygdala publishes a newsletter (10 issues for \$25) full of interesting information on Mandelbrot, Julia set, and other fractals, as well as a series of high-quality prints and calendars to dress up your walls. Contact them at PO Box 219, San Cristobal, NM 87564. 505-586-0197.

MICROSOFT AMIGA

A source inside Microsoft tells us that a group of Amiga users has been holding meetings inside the company. Reportedly, about 15 people attended the first meeting of the Amiga Alias group, though there's no word whether Bill Gates was one of them (we've heard he has an Amiga). One of the attendees hacked a Microsoft mouse so it would work with an Amiga, and there were software demos as well. We always suspected there was intelligent life at Microsoft, and now we have proof.

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